

The status of open access publishing by academic societies

As scholarly journal publishing continues the transition from print-on-paper subscriptions to licensed and open electronic publishing via the Web, the academic societies serving clinicians, faculty, and researchers in the basic and clinical health sciences will play a central role in determining the ultimate success of "open access" alternatives to commercial publishing. Academic societies provide health sciences students, faculty, clinicians, and researchers with their natural international community of peers and collaborators. Thus, these societies play a vital role in disseminating research information through the scholarly journals they sponsor. The following is a brief report on the results of two recent studies conducted in partnership with the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) and designed to look at the changing publishing practices of academic societies.

Carried out from July 2003 through December 2004, these studies looked at the characteristics of journals published by academic societies affiliated with the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), and High Wire Press as well as titles listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) <<http://www.doaj.org>>. The first study was cosponsored by AAHSL and AAMC through its Council of Academic Societies (CAS), which included some ninety-four member societies representing academic disciplines taught in schools of medicine. The primary goal of this study was to help these societies, as well as AAMC member institutions and their libraries, understand the problems and opportunities faced by the CAS society journals as they shift from paper to electronic publishing. The second study was cosponsored by ALPSP, High Wire Press, the American Association for the Advancement of

Science, and AAMC and was conducted by the Kaufman-Wills Group in Baltimore, Maryland. Called "Variations on Open Access," this study sought to determine the potential impact of open access publishing on the business, editorial, and licensing practices of scholarly society journal publishers.

The Council of Academic Societies (CAS) Journal Study

The CAS Journal Study collected bibliographic, pricing, editorial policy, and other data from each journal and its sponsoring CAS member, leading to a descriptive summary analysis of the status of journal publishing by these societies. The work was carried out by an AAHSL project coordinator, Gary D. Byrd, with support from other AAHSL member libraries and a student hired by AAMC. An eight-member Project Advisory Committee, including CAS society journal editors and publishers, the AAHSL representatives to CAS, AAMC leadership, the editor of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, and an economist reviewed the data and recommended additional analyses.

Of the 98 CAS members, 51 (52%) sponsor or publish at least 1 journal and, altogether, these societies publish just over 100 titles. Nearly half of these journals (46%) are published by or with the help of a commercial publisher, with Elsevier publishing twice as many as the next largest commercial publisher of these journals. A very large percentage of these titles are relatively new, with 42% first published since 1980. The average CAS journal publishes fewer than 2,500 pages per year and distributes more than 5,200 copies. These journals have relatively high ISI impact factors with an average of 5.100, but ranging up to 36.278. Print subscriptions for 2004 averaged \$546 per journal, and those prices had

increased more than 100% over the previous 5 years on average, or more than 15% per year.

The following data summarize the status of these journals' transitions to electronic publishing. Over half (53%) provide free access to at least some journal content from a Website, and nearly half (46%) have an electronic repository policy for back volumes. A very large majority (80%) has policies and procedures for licensing online access to libraries or consortia. Interestingly, a significant percentage (33%) maintains online versions of the journal that are *not* the same as the print version.

The Variations on Open Access Study

This study surveyed about 1,400 "open access" and "open archive" scholarly journals as well as the CAS journals and combined these findings with qualitative case-study interviews with more than twenty small, medium, and large scholarly journal publishers. Usable responses were received from a total of 344 journals. Open access journals were defined as those charging no subscription or licensing fee (and listed in the DOAJ*), and open archive journals were defined as the 184 High Wire Press titles providing some content for free as of September 2004. Forty-three of the CAS journals maintained archives at High Wire Press and, thus, overlapped the open archive journals.

The survey data collected in this study included demographic characteristics of each journal in 2004, editorial policies, business models, and sources of fiscal support. Table 1 provides a brief summary of some of the more interesting data

*The Directory of Open Access Journals responses included 113 titles (46% of the total) from 2 major commercial open access publishers, BioMed Central and Internet Scientific Publications.

Table 1

Summary of data from "Variations on Open Access" Study

	Directory of Open Access Journals	High Wire	Council of Academic Societies
Number of versions published (average)	7+	20+	28+
Article submissions per year (average)	1,600	1,000	1,000
Impact factors (average)	0.90	3.71	3.74
Online downloads per month (average)	553,000	166,000	100,000
Non-peer-reviewed articles published	28%	2%	3%
Post-publication peer review	35%	18%	6%
Author must transfer copyright to publisher	14%	67%	88%
Journal had revenue surplus	34%	80%	81%

from this survey and the case-study interviews, highlighting the different characteristics of open access (DOAJ), open archive (High Wire Press), and CAS society journals.

The responses to the following open-ended question provided some additional insight into how these journals are managing the transition from paper to online publishing: "What impact will the open access movement have on your journal and on scholarly publishing?"

■ Open archive journals (High Wire Press and CAS): The majority expected negative impacts (loss of revenue, authors unable to pay, government-mandated change), but many expected no impact. Only a few saw potential positive impacts (more visibility and an incentive to experiment).

■ Open access journals (DOAJ): Most were very positive about the potential to increase access to

knowledge, improve journal quality, and compete effectively with publishing conglomerates.

Finally, the case-study interviews suggested some additional general conclusions about the current status of scholarly journal publishing from the perspective of these open access (DOAJ), open archive (High Wire Press), and CAS publishers.

■ These publishers are experimenting with a wide variety of business models.

■ Scholarly journal publishers of every type and size are experimenting with open access.

■ These publishers most often attribute the pressure to change on the overall evolution of online publishing rather than the open access movement.

■ Most describe significant cost-cutting measures underway, especially in copyediting.

■ The management of copyright and reuse policies for these jour-

nals is independent of their open access policies.

■ They feel that the "library periodicals crisis" is also due to library budgets not keeping pace with the growth in research budgets and in the number of research articles being submitted for publication.

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